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SUBJECT: Why the Asia Regional Center of Excellence on Climate Change Should be in Bangkok

REFS: A) Bangkok 2046; (B) Jakarta 1314

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

11. SUMMARY. Ref A details USAID's plans to move forward with development of an Asia-Pacific Regional Center of Excellence on Climate Change and Development (ARC) in Bangkok. With the ARC's purpose to concentrate a network of leading U.S. and Asia institutions to advance the President's climate change and development objectives, I believe that Bangkok is the logical locus for the Center. Cognizant of Embassy Jakarta's points on Indonesia's importance for climate change efforts (see Ref B), Indonesia should be a key sub-regional center. But a combination of four factors makes Bangkok ideal for the ARC itself: the existing USG regional platform; the suitability of Bangkok's infrastructure as a hub; the close cooperative relationship of Thailand and the U.S. for our USG presence; and Bangkok's existing role as the major center in Asia for global climate change and development efforts.
END SUMMARY.

The USG Regional Platform in Bangkok

12. As a USAID-supported Center, the ARC should logically be where USAID considers the best central location. The reach of the Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) is from South Asia to the Pacific. RDMA programs engaging China and India are critical for realizing climate change and development results across the Asia-Pacific region. Initiating a new regional activity outside of the designated USAID regional hub would compromise fiscal and management efficiencies. RDMA already has established relationships and successful programs operating in China. It would be wasteful not to take advantage of this momentum.

13. RDMA already operates many programs out of our Mission that would feed into the ARC; separating these programs geographically from the ARC would dilute and fragment USAID efforts. The list is long, but only a few of the successful programs include the Environmental Cooperation-Asia Clean Development and Climate Program; the U.S.-China Sustainable Buildings Partnership; the Asia

Regional Biodiversity Conservation Program; the Responsible Asia Forestry and Trade (RAFT) Program; and USG support for the regional Coral Triangle Initiative.

¶4. RDMA plans additional regional climate change activities in the Asia-Pacific region, including: a regional climate and weather visualization and monitoring system ("SERVIR-Asia"); the Asia Responsible Biofuels Initiative; the Asia watersheds climate initiative (focusing on the Mekong and other river basins); the Resilience Initiative for Coastal Communities and Small Island Developing States; and the Asia regional green buildings/industries initiative.

¶5. Bangkok is also the base for over ten USG agencies that support regional programs with a connection to climate change, and partnerships across more than twenty countries in the Pacific and East, South and Southeast Asia. As East Asia's regional management platform for USG agencies involved in overseas operations, U.S. Mission Bangkok has the physical and human infrastructure in place to support additional offices. Judging from country clearance requests, a large proportion of USG program officers already pass through Bangkok on their way to other countries in Asia. It is no coincidence that the DOS regional environmental hub and the DOS regional financial center are also located in Bangkok.

Bangkok is Southeast Asia's Hub

¶6. As the host for the ARC's central facility, Bangkok will offer many advantages as the major logistics, transportation, and

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communications hub for the region. As a consideration for locating more USG personnel overseas, Bangkok provides a high degree of personal security compared with other locations in the region. For these reasons, Bangkok is already the site of more climate change and development conferences and events than any other East Asian city.

Thailand Remains Keen to Host USG Regional Activities

¶7. Approximately one-fifth of the Mission's close to 2000 U.S. and Thai employees work on regional health issues. While there are important linkages among public health, development, and climate change that provide another reason for the ARC to be in Bangkok, the USG health presence in Bangkok exemplifies the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) openness to USG regional work. Not only has the RTG permitted a 200-plus person CDC presence, but the CDC office is located within the Ministry of Public Health. Other USG agencies also have a large presence in Thailand (almost forty offices and agencies), owing to the Royal Thai Government's flexible accommodation on USG staffing levels. Any staffing increases necessitated by the ARC could be easily achieved here. Our close historical relationship with Thailand, both political and commercial, spans more than 175 years; we have never had to reduce staffing levels for political or other reasons, and we think it highly unlikely it would happen in the future.

Bangkok is the Climate Change and Development Capital

¶8. The ARC will be devoted to development in the context of climate change. Some 24 regional United Nations agencies and platforms operate from Bangkok -- many of which work in climate change and almost all of which work in development. We have just learned that the UN Environmental Program regional office will open a climate change Center of Learning next month. Other donor countries that work in these two areas have their regional platforms here just as we do. The major international financial institutions such as the ADB and the World Bank either have regional headquarters here or major regional offices for both development and climate change. The large international NGOs that work on climate change all have

regional offices in Bangkok. Thailand and its universities are leaders for climate change research in their own rights, but when the regional research institutions (including the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, the Climate Risk center in the Asian Institute of Technology, and the Stockholm Environment Institute) are factored in, the case for a USG climate change center is compelling. Post will send a full list of the Thailand-based climate change and development institutions to OES, USAID, and the Office of the Special Envoy - the list is truly impressive.

19. The entire Mission team is committed to working with all the U.S. Missions in the region to optimize regional work on development and climate change. The ARC would logically have sub-regional offices. As outlined in Ref A, the ARC would make integration with the President's Muslim World Initiative a priority, and for that reason, Jakarta and Dhaka would be ideal sub-regional ARC locations.

To make the ARC successful, we should build on the success that donors, universities, international organizations, and the USG have had in locating their regional centers in Bangkok.

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